

EXCISE

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DISCUSSION PAPER

STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH SOVIET COMBAT "BRIGADE" IN CUBA

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

Background

We have had inconclusive evidence for several years of the presence in Cuba of what appeared to be a Soviet unit of some type.

We have now confirmed through a variety of intelligence means that the unit is indeed Soviet, probably numbers between 2,000 and 3,000 men, and has armor, artillery, and motorized infantry components. We remain uncertain as to its mission and the precise date of its placement in Cuba. Our best estimate is that it was in Cuba by at least 1976. In addition to the "brigade," we estimate that there are about 1,500 to 2,000 Soviet military advisory and technical personnel in Cuba.

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8/31/99 (TARNOFF, Peter)

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY J.L. SMITH DATE 6/28/81

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SECRET/SENSITIVE

-2-

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-3-

B-1
A-3
A-5

B-1
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B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-4-

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-5-

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

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- * -- In September 1962, President Kennedy stated that should Cuba "...become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies."
 - In September 1970, Dr. Kissinger recalled a 1962 statement by President Kennedy that "as for our part, if all offensive weapons are removed from Cuba and kept out of the Hemisphere in the future, under adequate verification and safeguards, and if Cuba is not used for the export of aggressive communist purposes, there will be peace in the Caribbean." Dr. Kissinger added that "This, of course, remains the policy of this government."

B-1
A-3

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-6-

B-1
A-

B-1
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B-1
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B-1
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B-1
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B-1
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SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-7-

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-8-

B-1
A-5

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A-5

B-1
A-5

B-1
A-5

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-9-

B-1
A-1

SECRET/SENSITIVE

TABS

- A. Talking Points for Briefing Congress -
Soviet Ground Unit in Cuba
- B. Press Guidance
- C. "Base" Definitions
- D. Potential Uses for a Soviet "Brigade"
in Cuba
- E. Evolution of Soviet-Cuban Military
Relationship
- F. Verification Issue
- G. US Policy Toward Cuba

Talking Points for Briefing CongressSoviet Ground Unit in Cuba

-- We have recently confirmed the presence in Cuba of what appears to be a Soviet combat unit. This is the first time we have been able to confirm the presence of a Soviet ground forces unit on the island.

-- Elements of the unit appear to have been there since at least 1976. We estimate that it consists of 2,000 to 3,000 men. In addition, we estimate that the Soviet maintain between 1,500 and 2,000 military advisory and technical personnel in Cuba.

-- Ground forces per se did not figure in our bilateral understandings with the Soviets which were directed toward offensive weapons systems.

-- Nonetheless, we are naturally concerned about the presence of Soviet combat forces in Cuba.

B-1
A-5B-1
A-5B-1
A-5

- Q. Can you confirm reports that the Soviets have sent a combat brigade to Cuba?
- A. We can confirm that there have been for some time elements of a Soviet combat unit in Cuba. We have raised the matter with the Soviets and I am not prepared to comment further at this time.
- Q. Exactly how long has the brigade been in Cuba and how did we confirm its presence?
- A. Elements of the brigade have been there since at least 1976. I will not comment on the means by which we have established its presence.
- Q. When did you first learn about its presence?
- A. We have been developing information on this unit over a considerable period of time.
- Q. What is the brigade's mission?
- A. That is not yet clear.
- Q. What is the U.S. position on the presence of the brigade?
- A. We are naturally concerned about the presence of Soviet combat forces in Cuba. It is in this context that we have raised the matter with the Soviets.

- Q. Does the unit's presence in Cuba constitute a violation of the understanding with the Soviets on Cuba?
- A. Ground forces per se do not figure in our bilateral understandings with the Soviets, which were directed toward offensive weapons systems.
- Q. Senator Stone has argued that the presence in Cuba of a Soviet combat unit would constitute that establishment there of a base in violation of the US-Soviet understandings and the Administration's policy of opposing the establishment in this hemisphere of a Soviet base. Can you comment on that?
- A. I am not in a position to characterize the unit's presence as a base or not. We are actively pursuing further information on this matter. As I have said its presence is of concern to us.
- Q. Have we approached the Soviets on this matter?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Have we approached the Cubans?
- A. We are approaching the Cubans.

Q. What does the fact that the brigade has been in Cuba for several years without our knowledge say about our ability to monitor Soviet compliance with the SALT agreement?

A. Monitoring a SALT agreement and monitoring ground forces involve two quite different types of intelligence problems. Observations of the development and deployment, beginning with the initial test phase, of large, identifiable strategic force elements is in no way analogous to the problem of detecting a ground force element such as the small Soviet ground force unit in Cuba.

Q. But how could you have missed the Soviet unit over a period of several years?

A. We have had indications of the presence of a Soviet unit over the past three years and, during that time, we have been developing information about it.

SECRET/SENSITIVE

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SECRET/SENSITIVE

Potential Uses for a Soviet "brigade" in Cuba

B-1
A-4
A-3

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TOP SECRET/NOFORN/ORCON

- 2 -

B-1
A4
A5

TOP SECRET/NOFORN/ORCON

Evolution of Soviet-Cuban Military Relationship

E-1
A-4
A-5

B-1
A-4
A-5

TOP SECRET/NOFORN/NOCONTRACT

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Tab F

Verification Issue

E-1
A-5

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Tab G

US Policy Toward Cuba

7 B-1
A-5

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- 2 -

B-1
A-5

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SUBJECT:

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-2-

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-3-

B-1
A-5

1

SECRET/SENSITIVE

-4-

B-1
23



SECRET/SENSITIVE

-5-

B-1
A3